

Vera Showalter Gee

Tape 154

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The interviewer is probably Liz Sowards.

Vera: My name is Vera Showalter, Gee, now. I was born in Vernal, Utah, Dec. 11, 1908, and my parents were Glen W. Showalter and Alice Barney Showalter. My father came to Vernal in 1906, at the opening of the Reservation, from Panguitch, in southern Utah. That's where my mother was born. But my father was born in Iowa. In fact, his family are all from Virginia, except he's one of the younger ones. It was a big family.

I: What place in Virginia? Do you remember?

Vera: Roanoke, Virginia.

I: That's where my grandmother was from.

Vera: Uh-huh. He had two brothers that came to Panguitch before he did. They were in the sheep business. So he came, and only intended to come to visit them. In fact, I think one had died by then, and the other one wanted him to help him while he was sick. He went out with the sheep and decided that's what he wanted to do, too, so he stayed there. In fact, he stayed out the first time, when he first started in, with my uncle's sheep; he stayed for about five years, hardly came to town once, even. People wouldn't do that now. But he took his pay out in sheep, he got into the sheep business that way, and so then, with the opening of the reservation, decided to come up to the Uinta Basin, and see what he could find. He didn't like it on the reservation, so he went on to Vernal, and he liked it there, so he bought a ranch on Brush Creek.

My mother didn't come then, so he went back for her after he had got the ranch and thought he could settle down there. That was the days it took 'em about two or three weeks to come from one place to another. Roy was my oldest brother, he was just a year old then, he was born in Panguitch, and so they lived on the ranch, and for just about a year or a little more. I wasn't born until after they moved to town. My mother didn't like it on the ranch, and didn't want to stay on it, so my father bought a little home in Vernal and she lived there, and he sort of commuted back and forth for a while until he got someone to live on the ranch and take care of it. So, he was in the ranching, the sheep and cattle business, then for years. But then after he came to Vernal and lived in town, he was in several businesses besides that. He was always more or less in the sheep business, but he sold the cattle, and devoted his time to sheep. Then, when he was in Vernal, he built the Orpheus Theater, it was called the Orpheus then, he was the first owner of that.

I: Now, where did they get the name of Orpheus? How did they decide it?

Vera: He decided on that name because a great musician, Orpheus, was a Greek musician. So, my father decided on that name, and he run that, managed it, for about thirteen years. Then he sold it out to the [LDS] Church. The Church wanted to buy it, so he sold it to them. Oh, it was the amusement center of Vernal, roller skating, dancing, a theater troupe came in. I remember he had theater troupes that would come in, Ralph Vaughn and ? was one, great actors in those days, and hypnotists, they would be hypnotized and all that,

I: Oh, you were hypnotized yourself?

Vera: Oh, yes. They would get in the audience, and they would work on you, and first thing you know you'd be hypnotized. Then, um, he sold that and he was into different businesses. Always kept the sheep, though, and ranches. He always had a ranch. I know he sold the ranch out in Brush Creek, and later went into Colorado, bought one ranch up above Steamboat, and then the last ranch he bought was on Slater Creek.

I: Is that in Colorado, too?

Vera: Yes, in Colorado. Slater Creek.

I: And he'd get people to run those for him?

Vera: Well, yes,

I: Or did he go all the time?

Vera: No, he went back and forth, but he always had someone to live on the ranch. I remember there was a couple that lived on the Slater Creek Ranch before Roy, my oldest brother, met his wife up there, Opal, if you remember Opal Showalter?

I: Yes, I remember her.

Vera: She was teaching school up in that area. They had summer school because of the cold and the deep snow winters, they couldn't have school in the winter, so she was teaching that summer school. She had a trailer parked on the ranch, where she would go back and forth to school, that's where Roy met her. They were married and then they lived on the ranch. Opal was the girl that loved the ranch. You know, my mother didn't like a ranch, but she did, she loved the ranch. So, she lived on it then.

She would come to town in the winter, Vernal, and send her children to school. Then, they bought a home in Vernal, and their oldest boy, Robert, he took over the sheep business. My brother retired early, as far as in those days, and turned 'em over to Bobby. Bobby has been very successful with the sheep business. He bought them and other sheep—big herds to go with—he bought the N.J, Meagher Ranch and sheep. I think he has sold some of that now, but he's done real well. He still has them. He still has the sheep business, and he still has that ranch on Slater Creek.

I: Now did he build a new house for Thelma Wright? Was he the one that built that house?

Vera: No, that was Gary.

I: Gary. Now, what does he do?

Vera: Gary is... I should have told you, my father, although being in the sheep business, when he went into the garage he bought that especially for Don, because Don, my younger brother, didn't like, he was never a sheep man. He didn't like to be out with the sheep. So my father knew that he should have something, so he bought the garage.

I: Did you say that was 1936?

Vera: Yes, 1936.

I: Now, Gus, about when did you come to Vernal? [Gus is Vera's husband.]

Gus: 1934.

I: Now, did you come with the CCC, or...?

Gus: No, we were married and living in Provo, and I came out here to teach school.

Vera: I met Gus at BYU.

I: BYU?

Vera: Yes, when I was going to school. He graduated from BYU, and I did. The first time I graduated was with what they called a two-year normal degree, and I taught school, for five years.

I: Now, where did you teach?

Vera: Central School. All the time.

I: And what grades did you teach?

Vera: I taught second grade for five years. I taught kids like Ralph Ashton. I taught Carma Rae Davis, was one, Manwaring, was Howard Manwaring, so you know, oh, I remember a lot of them, and then that was the first five years. Then we were married, and I didn't go back into teaching until Gordy was five years old, and that was in a time when, of course, they needed teachers real bad, and I only intended to go in for a year.

Gus: When we first were married you moved to Provo with me.

Vera: Yes, we went to Provo for the first year, before we came out to Vernal, but then he got a job. In those days it was hard to get anything, you know. You were glad to get whatever.

I: I bet.

Gus: We just did jobs for a hundred dollars a month. For as long as they would have school. The first year I taught school, they only had enough money to run school for seven months.

Vera: But anyway, when I started the last time, Gordy was five years old and had started to Kindergarten, so he stayed with my mother that year. I only intended to teach a year, but after I got into it, they needed teachers, so I stayed on, not intending to, but stayed on all together for thirty years. Or was it twenty-five? Twenty-five years. I did.

I: Oh, all together?

Gus: Five years the first time, and then twenty-five years after that.

Vera: In the meantime we had Sherry, too. You know, she's older than Gordy, and you remember Sherry?

I: Uh-huh.

Vera: Well, I started in when Sherry was just in high school, and she went from there to the University of Utah one year, then she graduated from Utah State, and she was a teacher, too. She taught school for about three years before she was married, and Gordy, in the meantime, was going to school. I was still teaching when he went through high school,

I: Now, how did you manage that, teaching and a house? I just work at the library five hours a day, and I have two children, but it seems like it's a job. I really have difficulty keeping everything like I would want it to be, you know. In fact, I just don't do it. I can't seem to really cope with keeping everything like I want it.

Vera: Well, I was foolish. I say this because I tried to do all of my own work. Not that I couldn't afford it, but I just always didn't want to have anyone else do it, I'd just do what I wanted to do, you know. But I should have had help because it's too hard to try to do that and take care of a family and a house, and everything. But anyway.

I: I guess you had Saturday to kind of catch up. That's my difficult part.

Vera: Yes, I had Saturdays and holidays. I liked teaching, because I was home when the children were home. Gordy used to go to school with me and come back with me. I knew where he was all the time.

I: That's kind of nice.

Vera: It wasn't like they were running around alone or something. Gordy, of course, went to the University of Utah. Well, go back a little bit. In high school, he was very prominent in the high school his last year. He was student body president, he was the valedictorian, so, oh, he got all sorts of awards, even the music award, and the Johnsons award that. I went to the award banquet and I couldn't believe it.

I: That's the little – I see it there, I think. Is it this one right over here?

Vera: Yes, that's it. That's for the best actor. But anyway, Gordy's always been a very prominent student. Then he went to the University and was vice-president of the student body for two years up there. And in the band. He had to be in something, so he played the drums in the band. He graduated from that, and then he met Elizabeth.

He really hadn't gone with her very long, but he wanted to get married before he went back to law school in New York. I think it was a good idea, but he said, "I think I should get married, because I'll never have time to look at a girl after I get back there." So, he started going with her, maybe he had been going with her a little, with Elizabeth, and so they were married just before he went back. She went back with him. It was good that he was married, because she not only helped him, but I felt a lot better about him having someone to take care of him. They got along fine. Elizabeth worked and helped, and they made enough to pay rent, and things like that. We paid his books and tuition. They told us when he went into Columbia University, that if we could afford to keep him, they would accept him, but a student can't work and go to school there because it's too much for them to do. And we said we'd help, we'd take care of him, so we paid his tuition and books and everything, and Elizabeth helped. She worked for senators, and stenographers, and helped pay the rent, and things like that.

I: Now, they were in Washington?

Vera: No, Columbia, in New York.

I: Oh, so she worked for state senators?

Gus: No, she worked for Columbia University part of the time.

I: Oh, maybe one of the presidents or something?

Vera: President of the university or something. I don't – well, I knew it was something that she worked. And so, he graduated from there in three years. I think it was three years he went to law school, and then he stayed an extra year, got his law degree, a Doctor of Law, and then he stayed an extra year and got his doctorate of Educational Administration.

Then he went to several places. From there he came back to, oh, he was a law clerk to Judge Lewis, and then he went into Chief Justice Warren E. Burger's court.

Gus: Next he went to the University of Utah, after about one year, he went to the University of Utah, as the assistant dean of the law school, and then he was called to New York State College, and he worked for the Chief Justice Warren E. Burger for a few years. Then the BYU President Romney called him, and asked him if wouldn't come back there, and he went back to BYU as an associate dean for four years. Then he was asked to be dean of a law school of West Virginia, and he had been there three years and the presidency opened up, and they asked him to apply, along with a hundred and twenty-six others, and he was selected to be dean of the university. No, made *president* of the university.

Vera: Made president, and he's been president for three years, and he loves it. And the people love him. We went back there, he's a very homey kind of person, the kind that gets down to the people's level, you know,

I: Yes, he was telling us about taking some students from the upper campus down to the other. He just gave them a ride, and they didn't know he was the president.

Vera: That's one of his favorite jokes.

I: Yes, he was talking about the conversation.

Vera: Well, his joke was, just to tell quickly, was that at the school they had this monorail. It was a railroad to take the students back and forth, for their classes, and he found that it was too expensive to run all the time, so he had it shut off at certain times at night, and these students that he picked up didn't know he was president until he was just sort of inquiring "what do you think about the monorail system now?" They just said it was all right until that dumb president got in, now he has it shut off or something, and one of the kids touched the other. They found out who he was, so they sure felt foolish. It tickled him. He found out what they thought about it, anyway.

Anyway, he is still there and doing real well. Sherry, we should say something about Sherry because she's a darling girl, and she's very active in the ballet. She was president of the ballet guild year before last, and she's active in her sorority. That was the same one that Jane's in. And in the PTA, and several committees, and she has a nice husband, Malcolm F. Justice, he's a real nice fellow, and they have two nice boys. One's eighteen, he'll be eighteen this month, in a day or two, and the other one will be twenty-two. The youngest one graduates from East High this year, and the oldest one will graduate from the University of Utah. And there's only three grandchildren. Sherry's two boys, and Rebecca, Gordy's little girl, who is adopted, which they love very much. She's really a sweet little girl. She's nine, and they got her at four days old, and she's now nine years old. Was nine in December. She's real brilliant. She's really a brilliant little girl.

I: Tell us about Gus going into the oil business.

Vera: Yes. We built our home in 1937. Sherry was three years old. It was 1939. First, 1940, we lived in that home for thirty years, didn't we? Thirty. We could see your place from ours, just through the block.

I: Yes.

Gus: [unintelligible comment]

Vera: Oh, we weren't there in '40.

Gus: We moved in '40.

Vera: Yes.

Gus: In 1940, and we lived there until 1974 or '75. Then we moved to...

Vera: We sold the home, moved into one of the Campbell apartments, for a year, to try to get rid of things.

I: Do you mean Campbell in Vernal?

Vera: Don't you know that apartment down by Bry Stringham? We lived there.

I: Oh, you lived there. I thought you moved straight to Salt Lake.

Vera: No, we lived there for a year, and then moved out here. We were waiting for this to be built. In fact, we had bought it. But, it wasn't finished, so that's why we moved into an apartment. We had to get out of our house. It was a hard thing for me to do, you know, because I'd been there so long. But, we moved, we left there and came to Salt Lake, after we retired.

In the meantime, Gus went, after teaching school for ten years, in those days you didn't make much money, it's true, so he had to work on the side, my father owning the garage, which he bought from Harold Calder. Harold Calder had the Ford garage and my father bought it from him, and so Gus would work there in the summer, and after school and whatnot, to try to supplement the income. Then he was offered the job as the distributor for American, it was Utah Oil then. He thought at first that he could do both, he could teach and do that on the side, and he'd have two jobs, but he found that was too much. It was a full-time and so it paid more than teaching, and so he went into that. He was there for thirty years.

Gus: It was 1942 to 1972.

Vera: You were there for thirty years.

I: And did you sell that, too?

Gus: We didn't sell them. We turned them back to American Oil.

Vera: You mean the business?

Gus: Yes. I mean, we didn't own the property. But we owned all of our own trucks.

Vera: All the equipment and trucks and everything. So we sold those.

I: So he just took everything over, then.

Vera: All except the equipment. Like trucks and things like that. Well, anyway.

Gus: In Roosevelt...

I: So, now, you know, he must have sold that to McDonald's. Isn't that the one? Or is that the one? There's Texaco,

Gus: He had sold, right after I was out of it a little while, they turned it over to him as a job.

I: Oh, yes.

Gus: And that's all the further. Then he sold the property to a different, they moved it down. I don't know who bought the property now.

I: He moved it down, there's a McDonald's there.

Gus: Yes.

I: Or a 7-11.

Vera: Oh, yes, we went into that restaurant. The restaurant's there.

I: It was very modern. In fact, today, my son that's out here, he's working as a page. They were short on some pages, at the senate, you know, the messengers, and so he was waiting for his mission call, so Glade said why don't you come and do that.

Vera: Now which son is that?

I: Sam. The one that got hit by the truck.

Vera: Oh.

Gus: Is he normal, and everything fine?

I: He's doing pretty good. He got behind a little in school, and he's had difficulty. I shouldn't say, if he'd read to you, you know, you'd think he was a pretty good reader, but he really has a lot of trouble comprehending, you know, what he reads. Like he should, and I don't know if I should say remembering, if he wants to remember, he remembers. But he's never been the student like, see, our other son, Allen, in front of him, was the valedictorian of his class, and so it

may be that he, you know, sometimes you get a thought, "Well, I can't do as good as my brother," and you don't try as hard.

Vera: Yes.

Gus: Well, he's done real well.

Vera: That's true.

I: Well, he's a cute little guy, but anyway, he was going to run down to Inkley's and have his film developed, so he gave them to me, and in Vernal we can go to Inkley's and in an hour we can go back and get the pictures. They have the whole process. So I went down to the man and I said, "Here's the pictures, and how soon can I get them?" Well, out here they send them up to Layton to the place, and then they send them back, so it takes a day. So, I said, "Well, we're more modern in Vernal than you are out here in Salt Lake!"

Gus: Where are the Inkley's places?

I: You know where the old Rich Hotel was a long time ago? On that corner.

Vera: You mean that old Vernal hotel?

I: Yes. The old Rich. It's First North and Vernal Avenue, and the 7-11 is right on the corner where the hotel was, and then they are the next door north, going up Vernal Avenue.

Gus: It's about where Mrs. Martin lived.

I: Martin? Mrs. Martin? Yes.

Gus: Who is that now?

I: Chivers. Arlene.

Vera: Arlene, yes. She lived right back there.

I: Yes. That's where Inkley's is. We have Inkley's now.

Vera: Oh, you have everything.

I: We have Smith's, and they've got a K-Mart there now.

Vera: Yes.

I: A big K-Mart. And I think K-Mart thinks that's their best investment. Because you know, everybody in town goes and runs up to K-Mart, and it's been a sad thing, though, because

Ashton's people, you know they've always gone out to Salt Lake to shop at these places, where they can get three cents off, you know, and, you know, I think Ashton's is still surviving, but it's really hurt their business.

Vera: I heard they're having kind of a struggle.

Gus: What's that other one clear out there?

I: Gibson's .

Gus: Gibson's. The poor little guy is left out.

I: That hurts them, too.

Gus: We have talked about it quite a bit.

I: It's too bad, because they supported the community for years and years, and well, and in our business, you know, we supported people a lot, and it seems like the things that have been there, like in our business, the, what is that? Oh, not Maverik, but some of those cheap cut-rate things came in. They were all coming in, so everyone, all the people in town, would go over there and I don't think those stations ever supported a ball team, or put anything on the radio, or anything, you know.

Vera: No, that really isn't right, like you say, then when something comes in new, they all go there.

I: They don't realize that we're giving all of the time. You know, we were trying to give all the time, back to the community, and I'm not bitter about it, but I mean that's just the way life is, gosh, you know.

Gus: That's right and the fellow, you know, that took from me, anyway, he, I think he sold the service station. You know, Nile's –

I: Yes. In fact, Nile [Bigelow] just sold it. Yes. Nile has sold it to Red Hatch.

Gus: Oh.

Vera: To Red Hatch?

I: He improved it. He got a tire-changing bay, he's got a wheel-alignment place, he kind of really took over some of the things that Ken's business [was doing]. He retired and went out of business, so he kind of took things like they were doing down there, except he knew that there was going to be a little more need for that, you know, and they work on tune-ups and things like that. But anyway, Nile sold that, and they don't make the money on gas any more, because 7-11

and those places sell gas for almost cost, to get people to come in and buy their high-rate groceries.

Vera: Oh, yes.

I: And so, a service station that used to make a little bit on gas, they just don't make it any more.

Vera: It's too bad. What does Ken do now? Is he still in Vernal?

I: No, he's in Salt Lake.

Vera: Oh, he is? He sold his home?

I: Well, they're renting it. Vernal right now is in a state of, I shouldn't say depression, but it is. The economy is depressed right now because the oil, even the old oil supporters, you know, the oil companies, have since cut down drilling and all those things that used to keep the economy going. Oil shale is still there and it's going to have to be used some day to keep the world in supply. But I think they won't go with it until it's economical, until the price of oil goes back up to where they can produce it.

Vera: Uh-huh.

Gus: And Glade still has his bulk plant?

I: No, we sold it to Olympic Oil. Well, when we had the plant, we bought Olympic Oil. Out here, at the Citrus Conoco out here, OK, the man we went to out here was Jon Huntsman.

Vera: We know Jon.

I: OK, now, so we sold what we had out there to him. So he owns it now.

Gus: He lived over by Sherry. He's the state treasurer.

Vera: Well, he's very, very wealthy.

I: Um-Hum. You see, now, we used to own those stations that Jon has. And we owned part of them out here with him. I think we had twenty percent and he had eighty, out here, and so he was the financial, but we didn't have the money to buy it. So then when we got into difficulty out there [Vernal] with the economy, we had so many people on our books that oil companies made them pay for the gas in ten days, but we had to hold people on our books for ninety. So, you know how the interest went up to twenty-five or more percent, so we had to keep borrowing money, and we had borrowed money for equipment on two percent of those, so we couldn't handle it, so we had to sell it.

Gus: You bought the Clark place out there.

I: Yes, we still have it. We're going to probably sell it this next couple of months.

Gus: You might as well move out here.

I: We probably will.

Gus: Just about the time I retired, American Oil first made jobbers out of them, and then they quit the town and sold all their service stations, and moved out to Salt Lake and everywhere. And so that fellow was, I don't know, he bought that service station that Nile has, and sold it to Nile.

I: Amoco or Husky?

Vera: Husky

I: It's still Husky.

Gus: I figured I got out just in the nick of time. Not quite, it was pretty bad for the last two or three years. I hung on until I got my retirement and I retired.

Vera: I retired a little earlier than he did.

I: You got in under the wire, huh?

Gus: Got in under the wire. That's right.

Vera: Well, we've heard about a lot of the prominent people of Vernal who have had trouble, like Ashtons.

I: Well, all the old faithfuls.

Gus: Ken, and Glade and all of them. It's been terrible. And it would have been me if I'd stayed there.

I: You know, even the motel business. They built it up. They tore down the old Utah Motor by the Hotel Vernal, you know, and built a whole block of units.

Vera: Yes, we've seen that.

I: And they were all gearing up for this oil shale because all these people were coming in, and for a couple of years there the tourists had no place to stay because they were all used up all the time. It was great for a couple of years, then the oil people left, and there were not that many tourists. Because of the economy, people aren't vacationing, and it's been difficult for like the

Hendersons and that. I think they've been doing fairly well because they have sort of a clientele of salesmen and things that. Even that, so many things, like Lloyd Winward was saying, by the economy going down it's finally hitting people like accountants and things like that, you know.

Vera: It's too bad, it really is.

Gus: Uh-huh. We sold the hotel, Don and Roy and I, we owned the other half.

I: The Hotel Vernal?

Vera: Uh-huh.

I: You sold it to Westons?

Gus: We sold it to Westons.

Vera: Did Don sell his, too?

Gus: Yes. Then ? sold to Red Hatch, and Red bought Utah Motor and he bought that, and he was going to make a big killing, and— but...

I: Now, how did Drollinger and Caldwell get in that, Clark and Caldwell and Jim Drollinger? Did they buy it from Red?

Gus: They bought Utah Motor —

Vera: Now, my brother, Don, that owned Showalter Ford, they survived and are doing well. His son, Gary, runs the, you know, is the manager. Well, Don is still manager, I mean president, I guess, and Gary's the manager, but he manages it. He's the one that built it you know, in Vernal.

I: Well, it's been really good to talk to you. I think I'd better go.

End of tape.